

Second Thoughts on the President's Commission

Element of Stage-Management Is Apparent, Alexander Says

Washington — Republicans now are saying in guarded tones that President Johnson has made his first mistake. His appointment of a federal commission to supersede Congressional investigations into Mr. Kennedy's assassination is being described as a blunder.

President Johnson's plan is one that asks the federal establishment to investigate itself. The FBI and Secret Service were responsible for Mr. Kennedy's safety, and the failure ought to be deeply explored. But the idea that a presidentially-appointed group could affix even a well-deserved blame on one agency which represents the Justice Department or on another which represents the Treasury Department is not very plausible.

Also, there's the matter of U. S. foreign policy. Under Mr. Kennedy, and now under his successor, we are committed to cultivating Khrushchev and tolerating Castro. Would this commission take a position athwart these lines of policy? Dare it reveal information that would queer a nuclear test ban treaty? Or clobber the wheat deal? Unless a commission on



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matter of this solemnity has no inhibitions at all about uncovering the truth, what good is it?

Anti-Castro Story

Consider some of the stories on the town. A reputable anti-Castro Cuban has one which attempts to explain Lee Harvey Oswald as a gunman for Fidel. The story is that Oswald attended a saboteur school near Minsk, but the Russians considered him too erratic to be useful to them, whereupon he applied for a similar job with Castro, who can't afford to be choosy.

Castro was worried because Russo-American plans for a detente call for replacing him with a Tito-type Communist in Cuba. Under this arrangement, the Western World would give aid and trade to Cuba, and the Soviets would be able to cut down their assistance to the failing Cuban economy. The implication is that Castro had a motive—and, in Oswald, a possible accomplice.

This is one of the "fantastic" explanations of the Dallas tragedy which a congressional committee would like to probe. Witnesses would be called, cross-questioned and their testimony evaluated. If the story has any veracity at all, it ought to be bared. If it has none, the story ought to be

scotched.

Congressional hearings are the proper place for such work, and a federal commission is the wrong place. Congressional hearings often lend themselves to sensationalism, but seldom to suppression. Federal investigations are circumspect—their history has frequently been one of quiet burial.

Had not the Un-American Activities Committee exposed Hiss after the Federal Government, including President Roosevelt, had pooh-poohed what Whittaker Chambers was willing to tell, we would never have known Hiss as a hidden Communist. If the Senate Internal Security subcommittee had not kept after Owen Lattimore, who was a close worker with federal agencies and personalities, we would never have known what he was up to.

Somewhat Opposition

The President hopes to get a quiet, orderly and believable report from his commission, but Congress is composed of influential Southern chairmen and of ambitious Republicans who are not easily satisfied. The GOP will be desperate next year for something to blame on the Johnson Administration. It is as certain as the

coming buds of May that the harrowing memory of Mr. Kennedy's murder will be revived in the spring, and that the 1964 election season will ring with unseemly charges of cover-up.

Two of the commission's members are at least vulnerable to attack on their records. Chief Justice Warren, the chairman, can hardly escape a charge of bias against the conservative wing which has tormented him ever since he took his high office. Allen Dulles was director of CIA when Castro captured Cuba—when we had the worst kind of intelligence that led to the disaster at the Bay of Pigs.

President's Motives

Of the seven commission members, only Senator Dick Russell can be said to represent the conservatives whose extremist flank is being used to discredit the whole respectable right wing.

The President's motives are irreproachable. They include a determination to repair our reputation in the eyes of the watching world, and to spare the feelings of President Kennedy's family by giving this gruesome investigation a format of dignity.

But there is an unfortunate element of stage-management about the appointment of this commission.